

--On secrecy: Hershberg's account illustrates many of the facets of the Art of Secrecy. How Conant earned trust for discretion: i.e., for deceiving even his close friends and colleagues about what he knew or intended, and deceiving the public. How he showed (and earlier, must have learned, from his own "mistakes" or from the mistakes of others, earning Bush's fury or others') that a) he had no need to tell, and b) could take pride in discretion, and in being trusted with secrets, even in concealing work on illegal and mass-murderous weapons, "wrong livelihood," a chemist poison-maker; c) how it was legitimate and necessary to deceive the public so as to manipulate them: even when it involved "stealing an election," by a false promise of not sending US boys into combat (not only the President: Conant urged the draft openly, unlike the President, when he himself knew that he would soon be supporting sending them into combat, but didn't say so).

--As I was trying to get to sleep, or stay asleep, I realized that it was easy to push away thoughts of what I had been reading, e.g., the name of Conant, even though the name did not form consciously in my head. It was possible "not to think of elephants," without thinking, consciously, of an elephant. Apparently there is a pre-conscious thought, association, neuronal connection, with such a word or thought, before it enters conscious awareness.

I reflected that it was thereby evident that it was possible that one's conscious "rational calculations" are all (or sufficiently) weighed and chosen before entering consciousness, so as to come out with a pre-determined result. Thus they might all be in the form of rationalization: like diary entries intended for publication, like cover stories, like the Stimson account of the Bomb "decision." (Where a large part of the secret was how little "decision-making" was involved, how little there was to decide for the top people, how the result was never really in question or in

dispute: as well as the nature of the considerations that went into this "non-decision," the reasons the result was pre-determined, and the interests that came to be involved, perhaps not in deciding this "lack of necessity for a decision" but which confirmed or over-determined it. (I.e., the benefits for atomic diplomacy. My guesses last night about Conant suggest that the need for and possibility of this may have appeared, consciously or not, to Conant and other interventionists and globalists long before 1945 and before Truman became President. FDR may have been one of these--along with Wallace! (It turns out that Wallace was totally knowledgeable about the bomb from the very beginning, in at least October 1941 and probably earlier. In that he was in great contrast to the next VP, Truman, who was never told about the bomb till he became President! Thus, in April 1945, the Secretary of Commerce knew all about the bomb, but the VP did not! Could it be that Wallace never discussed this with Truman after Truman became privy, witting? Was Wallace not involved in later discussions, having been intimately involved, presumably even after he ceased to be VP?

What were Wallace's opinions about the proper use of the bomb, during and after the war? Has this ever been investigated, or discussed? How might he have conducted matters differently--given his obvious differences with Truman and Byrnes on relations with Russia?! How did he discuss this with them while he remained in the government?)

What lessons might we draw from the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, with respect to understanding and perhaps averting future nuclear wars? Dangerously wrong ones, I believe, if we accept--as nearly all Americans still do, and as most historians credited for a generation after the war--the self-serving, drastically incomplete and deliberately misleading accounts of US decision-making leading up to the attacks presented by former Secretary of War Henry Stimson and former President Harry Truman soon afterwards.

Most historical specialists on the episode have discovered the distortions in these versions of "history" and have published their findings in professional books and journals over the last twenty years, with a considerable consensus emerging on many--though not all--important issues over the last ten. But this consensus, and even the questions and issues addressed, remains virtually unknown to the American public and to most opinion-makers as well. The potential exists for a disastrous mis-reading by public and elites alike of the dangers that lie ahead in a world of nuclear proliferation, where states may acquire, ready, threaten or launch nuclear weapons for reasons roughly akin to those that influenced the actual decision-making in 1945 and earlier, to the bemusement of Americans who rely on a false, sentimentalized understanding of that history.

So the stakes are high, favoring a more realistic appreciation of that history, in the direction of the near-consensus reached by professional historians and beyond it. Yet the response so far to a tentative effort by the Smithsonian Institution to help bring that about shows clearly that any such attempt will arouse strong interests and passionate emotions in defense of the prevailing, false history. Nevertheless, the effort must be pursued, even if not by the Smithsonian or perhaps by any other institution whose budget is highly vulnerable to well-organized popular outrage.



\eg\neufeld
December 15, 1994

Debrief on discussion with Mike Neufeld, Tom Crouch and Steve Sator(? assistant to Harwit), December 15, 1994, 3-5:15PM (AFTER morning group conference with Harwit and staff, and our EG working group (Musil, Volk, Dear, Matlock, Coney....))

--MN: There's no chance of any major changes; nothing but a few word changes, to correct the misstatements I pointed out [i.e., I presume, to make them un-false, without making them other than misleading. I.e., to change them from false to misleading.]

--I did leave him with the chapters copied from Strauss (none of them knew of his role with Forrestal, or his position), Grew, Stimson memoir (especially passage on offer of Emperor, and conclusion in effect renouncing Just War restrictions. It is, indeed, plausible that since, as Stimson says, "the face of war is the face of death" that in the age of long-range bombers (or missiles) the distinction between Just Means and Unjust means is bound to be eroded, just as the distinction between "precision bombing" and terror bombing will erode. Maybe the concept of restraint in war is outmoded, after all--for all my clinging to it--see Rwanda and Bosnia and Panama (and Nicaragua, and El Salvador, etc; terror on the ground, and no one tried for it, even excluded from the CFR).

--So, these may have some effect on him. (He has read Sigal and Bird: latter, he thinks, takes McCloy's memoir (? diary?) too seriously; he says BB thinks Bird isn't cautious enough about memoirs. (But I think BB is selectively skeptical of such evidence, as in dismissing Ike's memory--when it doesn't serve Bernstein's theses).

--But there is little chance they will put in the evidence that would support my emphasis on the assurance option, because the Air Force Assoc. and Legion especially targetted that point. They insist, "It's outrageous to question the rightness or necessity for UCS." I ask: Do they still oppose retaining the Emperor? "No."

"Well, that was the issue." Anyway, virtually everyone except Byrnes--and Truman, after (not before) discussion with Byrnes--did recommend "modifying" or "clarifying" the surrender terms. When I mentioned the Stimson memoir concluding that this approach might have shortened the war, Crouch came back with "hindsight." But it was what Stimson thought at the time, along with Grew, Forrestal, McCloy, Bard, Leahy and the JCS (who seemed to compromise on this at Potsdam) and the Combined Chiefs of Staff and Churchill (and Stalin? Crouch thought the Australians may have objected to keeping the Emperor).

They thought none of the Legion or Air Force officials knew

anything of the history I described--of the assurance proposals. But their focussing on any mention of the possible modification of UCS seems suspiciously well-aimed. Since the controversy arose, MN said, some of them have been reading up.

Every time I said that the current text essentially followed the Stimson article, they came back that the Air Force doesn't agree--it doesn't go far enough for them, they want more changes (and every piece of body language and tone suggested that they expected to get them, correctly). On the one hand, MN told me that it had gotten too late for much change, for technical reasons: walls were going up, panels had to be made. Yet there were a lot of hints that there would still be some changes, n the wrong direction. E.g. the Air Force doesn't really like anything on Japanese victims: they had proposed that the whole Hiroshima room be eliminated.

I asked if there was some line they wouldn't cross, something that would be too much. Steve said quickly, "yes." "What?" "Overt propaganda."

I said (having come to a confidential and blunt tone in the discussion, which was very frank): Look in the mirror. You've crossed that line a couple of scripts ago. That's where you are.

"From the appearance in this 5th script of so many outright falsehoods--which I take for granted you wouldn't have allowed, if you'd realized--I suspect you are kidding yourselves, you haven't really faced just how far you've come, or where you are.

This is a justification for a slaughter of civilians, an act of terrorism on a genocidal scale. It's like a Ronald Reagan Library version of the Vietnam War, or Nixon's on the bombing of Hanoi, or LBJ on My Lai. Or a German memorial to the bombing of Rotterdam: "The deaths were exaggerated, there were only 900 killed." Or the Japanese minister's deprecation of the Rape of Nanjing.

It's not just a justification of strategic bombing, it's a justification of terror bombing, area bombing of the kind the US Air Force condemned when the British did it in 1943 or the Nazis and Japanese earlier.

Steve points out that the exhibit does show the scale of damage to the Japanese (after my lecture on the total omission of any indication of real alternatives). "But that can make it even worse. As long as no alternative is shown, as long as the whole thrust of the presentation is that this attack was necessary, therefore legitimate, acceptable, then when you show the actual damage, the worse you show, what you're conveying is, 'this is what

was acceptable and necessary, even this; this is what can be justified, under the right circumstances."

[It's a defense brief in a war crimes trial. Everything that can serve to justify, that suggests there was no alternative, is presented, as by Stimson; nothing that would weaken the case for a "necessity defense, a choice of evils defense" is included.

[Why it matters; American conviction that even this was justified and necessary; what isn't? Who else can be denied the same benefits? First use. Testing, etc.

How

[Hyp: interpret much of official "explanation" and even memoir-writing as if it were the construction of a necessity defense brief.]

civilians as the targets, victims (casualties) [can civilians, illegally targetted, be described as "casualties"--as if they were military?]

Tell story of Grew effort, and Potsdam consensus (speaking of consensu--not of historians, or officials with hindsight. True, none of these officials said, "under no conditions should you use this bomb"--i.e., a strict Just War application. (That seems to have been Leahy's feeling, but no evidence that he expressed it: as he did about gas and BW, which he saw as just the same. MN questioned whether any of the officials who proposed the Ultimatum-and-assurance really felt strongly against the bomb. I proposed McCloy (ask Bird); obviously, Bard. Apparently Strauss. (Forrestal?) They did not pose the offer as an alternative to the bomb, nor recommend it on the basis that it would make the bomb unnecessary (did they? McCloy on June 18?) --as they did, about precluding a Soviet entry, or making invasion unnecessary. (To do so would seem to have been to criticize the firebombing?) But see Ike. (BB discounts the testimony of Ike, Leahy and McCloy about their contemporaneous feelings and expression of them--in absence of documents. But then, it wouldn't show up for Szilard either i documents, except for petition. See Vietnam.

[Why did Stimson feel so strongly about firebombing--though he did nothing effective to stop it (could he have, practically speaking?)--and less, it would seem, against using the bomb?

December 16, 1994

Reflections on yesterday's discussion (from 3 to 5:15 PM) with Mike Neufeld and Tom Crouch, curators of the Enola Gay exhibit (along with Steve Soder, assistant to Martin Harwit):

This exhibit is a scandal for the Smithsonian. Bending to the institutional interests of the Air Force--allied with uninformed, long-indoctrinated veterans with a heavy emotional investment in a personal and national myth (that their own lives were saved by the bomb, and that they have a right to feel grateful about this despite the destruction of "enemy" lives)--they are presenting a long and elaborate commercial for nuclear weapons, in the form of a celebration of the first models and their spectacular humanitarian success as life-savers, on balance. (No hint is given that anyone has ever suggested that many officials at the time believed, on evidence, that there were other ways to bring about Japanese surrender without invasion, perhaps much earlier, with a smaller or no cost in lives, or that postwar information indicates that they might well have been right).

The version of "history" presented bears the same relation to historical truth-seeking a criminal defense brief: though actually, such a brief in an adversarial proceeding, expecting vigorous cross-examination and opposing argument, is usually more careful to guard against actual falsehood or too-blatant omission of crucial issues.

A better analogy is public relations statements (not even, testimony under oath before a hostile committee) by a tobacco company spokespersons or in a paid advertisement. Or by asbestos companies (before exposure of the dangers). Or advertisements for Ford Pintos (likewise). The comparison to such products reflects the fact that what is being sold here is nuclear weaponry, and their use in war, on people. The sub-text here, which has not been missed by a larger audience over the years, is: "Every country needs these" (especially if your neighbor might respond to the same ad).

How can these museum curators have responded to such ignorant or anti-intellectual political pressures in a way that would be normal if they were working for an advertising or public relations agency? (Or a "dirty" political campaign). Or the Department of Defense, Have they managed to maintain any respect for their institutioor theyn by recasting their conception of its role as, properly, purveying patriotic lies?

The curators are not specialists in this particular subject, but they are now extremely well informed in the specialized historical literature on it. They know perfectly well that their version of history would not be accepted as remotely adequate--as being an acceptable brief or even simplified approximation, or

indeed as anything other than seriously misleading--by any historian who has made a special study of this episode.

(Is there a single exception to this? McCulloch's version in his biography of Truman seems widely recognized by such historians as superficial and even dishonest, part of a hagiography of Truman. The biographer of JFK who wrote on this? Rhodes? Some military historians?)

The issue is not (as MN attributed to Alperovitz, overstating his view, I think) that Truman or any advisors saw alternatives to the bomb--as such, in the same decision context--that were certain to produce unconditional surrender or even surrender on our "terms". The bomb didn't offer that prospect either.

Certainty was not really an issue: it was not presented as associated with any alternative (except invasion along with Soviet participation).

What nearly all officials actually perceived (a fact totally missing from this exhibit) was that one or a combination of approaches not including either bomb or invasion might produce a surrender, perhaps before August 6, and they believed that this was not only worth considering but worth trying--they strongly and repeatedly recommended it--in July, before the bombs were available. And this was rejected by Byrnes and Trumans: on reasoning that was known to all these officials (essentially, domestic controversy), but which did not convince them that the trial should not be made.

There is no evidence at all--on the contrary, for Truman--that either Truman or Byrnes disagreed with the assessments of these officials that these other approaches might work, either singly or in combination. (On several occasions, Truman said that he did agree, and even directed that they be prepared; but he was persuaded, twice, to postpone the initiative, and finally persuaded by Byrnes to drop it till after the bomb had been dropped).

Thus, the President and all his top officials, military and civilian (with the possible exception of Byrnes, whose attitude on this not known to us) believed that neither the bomb nor invasion was "necessary"--in the sense of "absolutely necessary," no acceptable Japanese surrender being attainable, possibly, without one or the other or both. That is the exact sense in which the exhibit conveys, falsely, that they did see either the bomb or invasion: or, to put it another way, the way they purportedly did see the bomb as "necessary" to avert an invasion, to achieve an acceptable surrender without an invasion. Or to do so "as early as possible" (to save the American lives being lost daily).

On the contrary: all these officials saw the bomb as possibly not necessary. They saw--and all except Byrnes recommended to the

President--approaches that might end the war acceptably without the bomb or invasion. (Not all of them--conceivably, not any of them, as Neufeld suggests, I believe incorrectly--because they had intense scruples about using the bomb or wished to avoid it "at all costs" or even at any great cost. At least some of these were as willing to use the bomb, if necessary, as anyone else; but they all preferred to try an approach that might end the war earlier than the bomb could be available. Thus, they were not so anxious to use the bomb--or to avoid domestic controversy about "clarifying" the surrender terms--that they were prepared to pass up a possible chance to end the war earlier than it could be used, at some cost in American lives and increasing the likelihood of Soviet entry into the war. (Byrnes and Truman accepted both of these costs, for reasons that subject to controversy).

Moreover, virtually all of these officials believed that one of these approaches, the offer to keep the Emperor, was itself probably necessary: that even the bomb would not be sufficient without it, even with Soviet entry: that a Japanese surrender would not be forthcoming without it. And all evidence indicates that this view was correct. Thus, since this offer might be sufficient, and was almost surely necessary (i.e., it would have to be made sooner or later), there seemed every advantage (except for domestic controversy: which did not seem likely to be prolonged, since it would probably be quelled shortly by victory, even if the offer was not immediately accepted: both Soviet entry and the bomb were in the offing) in trying it early and ending the war as soon as possible. So it seemed to Grew in late May (with Truman initially agreeing), and to Bard, McCloy and Leahy in June. Others preferred to wait till it could be combined with a warning on the bomb (after it had been tested successfully) and with announcement of imminent Soviet entry (Stimson: perhaps Forrestal; the JCS).

It was not: the bomb is not necessary, because this other approach is sure to work. It was: the bomb may not be necessary, because this other approach may work, sooner--perhaps averting Soviet entry, as well as shortening the daily losses in American lives and averting massive Japanese deaths either from more daily firebombings or from the bombs (for those who cared about the latter)--and the cost is negligible (except to politicians who intend to run for President: Truman and Byrnes). (Hull, too, thought that the offer should be postponed till after "the climax of the bombing"--presumably, the atomic bomb).

The choice by Truman and Byrnes is also consistent with Alperovitz's interpretation that they wanted to use the bomb and were willing to wait for this, keeping the war going (i.e., rejecting even costless initiatives that might end the war before the bomb could be used) for this purpose. (However, even if this was among their reasons for rejecting the recommended approach at Potsdam--as it probably was, I think--I'm not convinced that Alperovitz is right in writing off as another motive their concern

about domestic criticism).

Back to the Smithsonian. Having heard all this, and acknowledging that it is "reasonable and persuasive interpretation" of the alternatives perceived and presented by US officials, Neufeld still says that it is virtually impossible that it can be presented in their exhibit, or even that the exhibit can be changed so that it no longer asserts (falsely) the opposite, the negation of this view of the perceived alternatives. Because, he says, it is in particular this very view that the organized critics, the Air Force Association and the Legion, are determined to extirpate and suppress. (Not a coincidence, I would say: like the tobacco companies' determination, earlier on, to suppress any mention of a health hazard, or "responsible", authoritative assertion of this).

The particular, familiar, official "simplification" (falsification) of the decision-making context happens to be the only one that compellingly justifies, for the great mass of Americans, this slaughter. Even the exaggeration of the number of deathsto be expected in an invasion is probably essential to this (though the lower numbers would probably be seen as sufficient justification--every other element of the argument remaining the same--by many or most Americans, with perhaps some unease).

What are the stakes? For the aerospace and nuclear weapons industry, their product: strategic bombers and missiles, nuclear weapons: their image, their legitimacy, their continued development and production and military deployment. For the Air Force, its self-image and self-respect, its role, its budget. For the US Government--to a less central but still significant degree--its domestic and international authority and image, its influence, its leadership role. For Americans, self-respect and identity--the considerable degree these depend on identification with Presidential and military performance and character (as in My Lai, and Viet Nam generally). Big stakes: against historical truth, in this case (as in My Lai, or Vietnam).

On the other side: the need to delegitimize the bomb and its (further) use, to stop proliferation (and first, to stop promoting it), to move toward drastic reductions in the nuclear weapons states led by the United States, to achieve no-first-use commitments, to stop testing, to get extension of the NPT.

As in the case of tobacco and asbestos and Ford advertising, lives are at stake. Immensely more lives, potentially all or most of humanity (whose lives may be shortend by prevailing falsehoods on these matters, including false history like this). The only difference is that the lives are not being lost every day (except from past radiation, and some ongoing radiation). (No particular death can be surely traced to tobacco, or to a particular advertising campaign, either, for that matter: does that console

advertising officials?)

And in the case of the Smithsonian, unlike the ad agency (or the Department of Defense) there is also the matter of intellectual and scholarly standards, of truth-telling, an obligation not to tell lies and not knowingly to mislead. The current exhibition text does both. If the Smithsonian persists in this--as its curators expect (evidently washing their hands of it, at this point, on the grounds that "the decision has gone higher")--it is accepting a role as a propaganda arm of the government, or in effect, of the Air Force Association and the American Legion.